

Transactions

FALL 2010

TRANSPORTATION NEWS
FOR THE NINE-COUNTY
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA



Transportation Awards 2010

Excellence in Motion

Welcome to this special issue of *Transactions*, in which we highlight the winners of MTC's 29th Transportation Awards Program. The biennial competition honors people, projects and organizations for exceptional contributions to Bay Area transportation. We received a healthy crop of 72 entries this round, from which we selected 11 winning people and programs to receive the Excellence in Motion trophy — a handsome wooden base topped by an engraved ball bearing, the universal symbol of motion.

This year our jury took the unusual step of splitting the Grand Award honor among four organizations and their multitude of volunteers — extending from Marin and Alameda counties to San Jose — for their work to inspire students to make smart transportation choices, and to give them the tools to travel safely by foot and bike. These innovative programs collectively have touched tens of thousands of youths, and serve as models for the region, the state and the nation of how to steer the next generation away from our ubiquitous car culture and toward a more sustainable future.

We're also honoring six individuals — sadly, two of them posthumously — who clearly stand out for applying their leadership, creativity, passion and tenacity to making the Bay Area transportation network safer and more accessible, and for fostering sustainability and regionalism. Rounding out the list of winners is a ramp-metering project on the Peninsula that is a model of intercity and interagency cooperation.

View video profiles of the winners at mtc.ca.gov/about_mtc/awards.



At Cycles of Change's after-school programs, youths learn how to maintain bikes and have the opportunity to help rebuild a donated bike to take home.

Grand Award Winners Educate the Next Generation on Sustainable Choices

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS TEACH DO-IT-YOURSELF BIKE REPAIRS, BIKE/PED SAFETY AND MORE

Thanks to the four organizations sharing MTC's 2010 Grand Award, Bay Area children and teens are destined to become some of the savviest people around when it comes to making environmentally friendly transportation choices. And whether they're pedaling on two wheels or relying on their own two feet to get to school and other destinations, they'll also be some of the safest youths on the planet. By encouraging young people and their families to become more environmentally aware and to take small steps that collectively can make a big difference, these four organizations are, as one child put it, helping kids "learn how to be better to our Earth."



After students practice cycling in a safe environment, they have a chance to expand their horizons via bike field trips.

Grand Award: Cycles of Change Teaches "Bike Love"

Cycles of Change, an Alameda County nonprofit organization, not only teaches youngsters how to ride bicycles safely, it also helps them earn their own bikes and teaches them how to maintain them. Since the program began in 1998 — by teaching a bike safety course at an East Oakland middle school — Cycles of Change has expanded to providing after-school programs in a number of schools in Oakland as well as one in Newark, teaching a PE curriculum in classrooms throughout Alameda County and running a community bike shop.

More than 13,000 students have learned how to ride bicycles safely for fun and good health, and some 4,000 kids have earned their own bikes to take home.

"Bike love is what we offer," said Maya Carson, president and co-founder of Cycles of Change. "It's really from our hearts, and that's why our program is successful."

Cycles of Change staff and volunteers run after-school programs primarily out of basement rooms in public schools, with donated used bikes. After they practice riding in the safe con-

finer of the schoolyard and learn to traverse their own communities safely by bike, students have the opportunity to go on bike field trips to places of ecological and cultural interest. Cycles of Change also shows the students how to combine bike excursions with BART and bus trips.

The after-school clubs also teach bicycle mechanics so kids can maintain their own bikes. Once they master the basics, the students — who are primarily low-income — can help refurbish a donated bike to take home along with a helmet and lock.

In addition, Cycles of Change takes a six-hour bike safety training course to elementary and middle school PE classes throughout the county, providing a fleet of bicycles for the students to use.

At Cycles of Change's bike shop in East Oakland (The Bikery), staff and volunteers refurbish bikes to sell or to give away; youths and adults in need can learn by doing, and earn a bike in the process. The group also takes refurbished bikes out into the community for training and giveaways for low-income adults.

— Marjorie Blackwell

See inside for more Grand Award winners.



John F. Foran Legislative Award: State Senator Darrell Steinberg



When State Senator Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) forged a coalition of environmentalists, builders, local government officials and affordable-housing advocates to propel Senate Bill 375 to passage, he linked California's land use and transportation planning together for the first time. SB 375 aims to change how future development will occur across the state, using incentives to influence city and county growth patterns.

The "coalition of the impossible," as the senator called it, was built over a two-year period and culminated in the signing of SB 375 by Governor Schwarzenegger in 2008. For his efforts, Steinberg is being honored with the John F. Foran Legislative Award, named for the former Bay Area legislator who authored the bill creating MTC in 1970.

Currently holding the top leadership post in the state Senate as president pro tempore, Steinberg was chair of the Natural Resources and Water Committee at the time of SB 375's crafting.

Bill Cravens, the chief consultant to the Natural Resources Committee, credits Steinberg with its passage. "There are very few times when so many interests agree on a bill," Cravens said. "The senator's credibility was essential to the process. All the interest groups gained something, but none got everything they wanted. Everyone had to agree on the final text of the bill, and had to communicate that to the governor. The bill wouldn't have happened without Senator Steinberg carrying the legislation."

SB 375 aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles by integrating land use and transportation planning and encouraging development along already existing transit corridors. The law promotes environmentally friendly, compact communities with jobs, housing and services in closer proximity to one another, giving residents the option to leave their cars at home and to walk, bike or take transit instead.

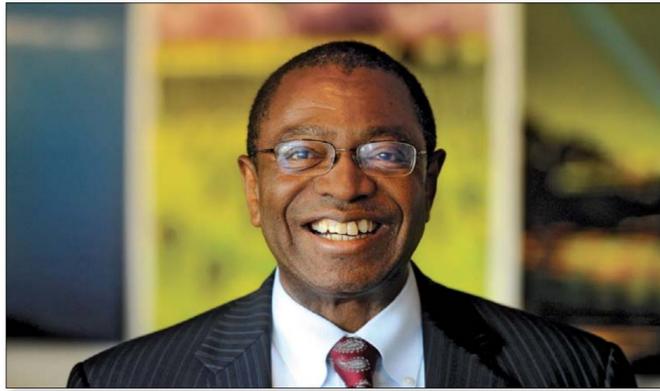
Commenting on SB 375, Steinberg said, "There is a once-in-a-several-decade opportunity here to change our development patterns in ways that promote growth, promote affordable housing, maintain local control and at the same time are furthering our essential goals to improve the climate and to improve air quality."

— Terry Lee

Calendar

For dates, times and locations of upcoming MTC meetings, visit mtc.ca.gov/meetings.

**Greta Ericson Distinguished Service Award:
Henry Gardner Honored for a Lifetime of Public Service**



Collaboration with sister regional agencies was a hallmark of Henry Gardner's tenure as the executive director of the Association of Bay Area Governments.

This year marked a milestone for Henry Gardner as he stepped down from his role as the executive director of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). He leaves with nearly 30 years of public service, but isn't retiring just yet.

Gardner cut his teeth in government in the city manager's offices in Carbondale, Ill., and then Oakland, eventually becoming the city manager at the relatively youthful age of 35. The city was facing big challenges. "Oakland had just eliminated 1,000 positions as a result of Proposition 13, closed four fire stations, closed eight branch libraries," he recalled.

After 22 years with the city of Oakland, he seemingly retired from public service and went into consulting. But Gardner had an interest in regionalism, so when the position of deputy executive director of ABAG became available in 2003, he found himself once again in government. After only a year and a half as deputy, he became the executive director of ABAG.

Gardner believes in building relationships, and he has been credited with improving ABAG's rapport with other regional agencies while garnering the respect of his staff,

agency partners and local officials. "He tries to understand all sides of an issue before making a decision. He welcomed input from his staff at all levels," noted ABAG Assistant Executive Director Patricia Jones.

Former Oakland City Councilmember Dick Spees called Gardner "a true leader," pointing out that in 1990 Gardner was named the most valuable city manager in the nation by *City and State Magazine*.

"It was authentication of what we all believed," Spees said.

Now Gardner is capping his public service career with MTC's Greta Ericson Distinguished Service Award, named after the founder of MTC's awards program.

While Gardner is leaving public service once again, "it's not over yet," as he often likes to say. His private firm — Gardner, Underwood & Bacon — is a financial advisor to cities and counties. Gardner hopes to one day find a permanent source of income for ABAG and continue to influence regional government in a positive way.

"Public service is an honorable calling," he said. "And it has been a distinct honor to have served."
— Pam Grove

**David Tannehill Special Employee Award:
Alec Melkonians, Unsung Hero of the Toll Bridge Seismic Retrofit Program**

During his 19-year career with Caltrans, engineer Alec Melkonians not only left his mark on several major Bay Area bridge/road retrofit and rebuilding projects, he also left a lasting impression on hundreds of colleagues and community members. After his unexpected death in February 2010 at the age of 44, so many people attended his memorial service that they filled the chapel, the overflow room and the lobby, and spilled onto the sidewalk.



Alec Melkonians was a "brilliant engineer" who made his mark with several challenging bridge and highway projects.

Melkonians was the obvious choice for the David Tannehill Special Employee Award, named after a dedicated and talented MTC planner who passed away in 2001. "Alec was a brilliant engineer and a dedicated public servant with this amazing energy level. And he was incredibly optimistic," said Denis Mulligan, general manager of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District and a former top Caltrans bridge engineer.

Early in his career, Melkonians was a design engineer on the project to replace the Cypress Structure along I-880 in Oakland, which had collapsed in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. Then he worked on seismic retrofit projects for the Carquinez and Richmond-San Rafael bridges before going on to quarterback the rebuilding of the West Approach to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge to meet current seismic standards. Melkonians worked to personally engage neighborhood residents and businesses.

"The West Approach was one of the most complex public works projects in California history, and Alec touched all aspects of it," said Caltrans Project Manager Ken Terpstra.

Melkonians then moved on to another monumental project, the new East Span of the Bay Bridge. "He had an ability to make it seem easy when he worked real hard to help the team deliver these complex projects," Mulligan said.
— Karin Betts

Grand Award: Street Smarts Saves Lives in San Jose and Beyond

Eight years ago, in response to the hazards children often face in school zones — speeding cars, congestion, double parking and blocked crosswalks — the city of San Jose launched a model Street Smarts School Safety Education Program. Today, the program teaches 23,000 children a year how to be safe pedestrians and bicyclists through presentations at elementary and middle schools, bicycle "rodeos," and bicycle helmet inspections, fittings and giveaways. Since it began in 2002, pedestrian and bicycle injury accidents among San Jose children aged 5 to 14 have decreased 30 percent.

Lively, interactive school assemblies introduce students to the importance of using crosswalks, looking in every direction and making eye contact with drivers before they cross a street. The students also learn to always wear helmets when riding their bikes, scooters or skateboards. They receive educational materials, offered in three languages, to review with their parents and siblings, and they are encouraged to find answers to puzzles and games on the

website, <www.GetStreetSmarts.org>. A DVD on pedestrian safety is shown not only in classrooms and after-school programs, but also in hospital and clinic pediatric waiting rooms. And at the bike rodeos, youngsters follow an interactive simulation course to improve their bike safety skills.

"We are talking about saving lives," said Tara Jones, coordinator of the Street Smarts Education Program. "We want kids to realize the importance of being safe while they're walking and bicycling, and to be aware that drivers don't always follow the rules and stop at crosswalks. We want the kids — and everyone — to be defensive pedestrians and bicyclists, and to take personal responsibility for their safety."

Street Smarts also offers safe driving, bicycling and walking programs to 3,000 adults and seniors a year. In addition to instructing its own San Jose residents on how to be safe pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers, the city offers its Street Smarts curriculum and materials to other cities.

"We wanted to develop a program that



Tara Jones (left), coordinator of San Jose's Street Smarts School Safety Education program, explains the importance of making eye contact with drivers before stepping out into the street.

could be used by any size city," says San Jose Traffic Safety Education Manager Linda Crabill Byrne. "We developed each element of the program so we could share it with other cities, and we now have 25 Street Smarts partner cities throughout California."

The Street Smarts program was created by the San Jose Department of Transportation with assistance from traffic safety professionals, community stakeholders and other agencies, including MTC.

— Marjorie Blackwell

Grand Award: Safe Routes to Schools Serves as National Model

Encouraging students to walk and bicycle to school — and ensuring they can do it safely — is the mission of Marin County's Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S) program.



The Safe Pathway element of the program has directed \$10 million to improving sidewalks, crosswalks and the like in the vicinity of schools.

This first locally funded SR2S program in the U.S. was organized 10 years ago by the Marin County Bicycle Coalition and community volunteers who wanted to reverse

the trend of parents driving their children to school.

Since 2004, SR2S has been overseen by the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), which funds the program in part with sales tax money. Today, SR2S serves 55 schools and more than 20,000 students a year. TAM and its partners — local jurisdictions, school administrators, parent volunteers, Parisi Associates, the Marin Community Foundation and the Marin County Bicycle Coalition — have expanded in several directions. The Safe Pathway program has directed \$10 million to improving sidewalks, crosswalks and the like in the vicinity of schools. The expanded effort also includes 75 crossing guards countywide and the Street Smarts messaging program, adapted from San Jose's program (described in the story above). Most recently, TAM launched a "Green Ways to School" program, which has enrolled over 1,000 families in online ride-matching for trips to school.

The results: The share of Marin County students being driven singly or driving them-

selves alone to school has dropped from 62 percent to 48 percent. And, the Marin model of SR2S has sparked a national movement.

"It's important to educate children at a young age," noted Wendi Kallins, founder of Marin's SR2S program. "If they're put in a car and driven everywhere, then they assume that's the only way to get around. If they learn that walking, biking, taking the bus and carpooling are other choices, as they get older they will make those choices."

"Trying to get high schoolers out of their cars is really hard," said Anna Garfink, a student at Sir Francis Drake High School in San Anselmo. "But biking is one of the greatest ways to help the environment, your body and the community." Drake High School student Eve Penberthy, who bicycles or walks to school and carools when it's raining, added, "Bicycling to school is not such a big deal. I just put on an extra jacket if it's cold or wear shorts instead of a skirt. I know how important it is to have less greenhouse gas emissions."
— Marjorie Blackwell



Grand Award: Cool the Earth Reaches 55,000 Students

Five years ago, after she saw "An Inconvenient Truth," Marin County resident and parent Carleen Cullen was inspired to do something about global warming. "We had a community discussion on the film," she said, "and I found that no one was doing simple things to reduce our carbon footprint. I realized that kids can make the difference, and we needed to get schools involved."

Beginning in a single elementary school in 2007, Cullen founded Cool the Earth, which has since spread to nearly 200 schools and Girl Scout troops throughout the Bay Area and beyond. Run primarily by volunteers, Cool the Earth teaches children about the impacts of climate change and motivates them — and their families — to take simple transportation and conservation steps to reduce their carbon footprint.

In elementary and middle school assemblies, parent volunteers, teachers and students dressed as polar bears and the evil "Mr. Carbon" portray the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions on the environment. The students are given coupon books listing

20 simple actions they and their parents can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as walking, bicycling or carpooling to school, driving 55 miles per hour or less, and reducing auto engine idling. Children and their families are asked to sign pledges on actions they will take.

Cool the Earth staff and parent volunteers measure and track the number of actions taken at each school and the resulting pounds of carbon saved, prominently displaying the numbers on banners at each participating school. "The problem is so overwhelming," Cullen said, "that people feel what they do doesn't matter. But through collective actions, they see they do matter." Since 2007, Cool the Earth reports it has motivated over 55,000 students and their families to take 115,000 transportation and energy-conservation actions, eliminating more than 90 million pounds of carbon. Cool the Earth also estimates its participants save anywhere from \$80 to \$1,500 a year through using less gas and other energy-saving actions.

"Behavior change is one of the most difficult things to accomplish. We follow



Cool the Earth school assemblies feature skits in which friendly polar bears and the evil "Mr. Carbon" convey the impacts of global warming.

models, such as stop-smoking and seatbelt campaigns, which have proven effective," Cullen said, adding, "Kids are the best monitors. They can see if their parents are driving over 55 miles per hour."

Cool the Earth has formed partnerships with the Bay Area Air Quality Management

District, Girl Scouts of Northern California, PG&E, the Marin Community Foundation, Marin Conservation Corps, Strategic Energy Innovations, the Marin Municipal Water District and the county's Safe Routes to Schools campaign (see above).

— Marjorie Blackwell

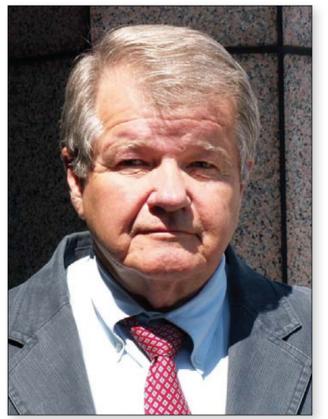
Miriam Gholikely Award: Jim Gleich, Champion of Equal Access

It's no accident that the event marking the passing of Jim Gleich was billed as a celebration of his life, not a memorial. Because there was much to celebrate about the AC Transit executive's rich career in the public service and nonprofit sectors, and especially his 15-plus years at the East Bay bus system.

Gleich came to AC Transit in 1994 as an employment and accessibility specialist, rising to become assistant general manager, and then, in 1999, deputy general manager for external affairs, a position he held until his death at the age of 66 in March of this year. Although it never slowed him down, a disability of his own no doubt contributed to Gleich's strong sense of social justice and compassion for AC Transit's less-advantaged riders.

"Jim Gleich was a plain-talking, no-nonsense advocate for public transportation who was genuinely concerned about people who are elderly, low-income and/or disabled," said AC Transit Interim General Manager Mary King. According to King, Gleich successfully led campaigns for a series of AC Transit parcel taxes to keep fares affordable and ward off service cuts.

Gleich also was a long-time, active board member of the California Transit Association, where he played a leadership role in protecting and augmenting transit funding flowing from the state. "Jim Gleich was respected as a 'voice of reason' by legislators in both Sacramento and Washington, D.C.," King said.



Jim Gleich worked to keep AC Transit affordable and to ward off service cuts.

Among his many volunteer activities, Gleich was the driving force behind a scholarship fund targeted at low-income college students in AC Transit's service area. MTC is honoring him posthumously with the Miriam Gholikely Award (named after a longtime MTC advisor and community activist) not only for his contributions to AC Transit, but for the entire sweep of a career that spanned four decades and took him to state and federal government offices, and a national disability rights organization.

— Brenda Kahn



**Doris W. Kahn Accessible Transportation Award:
Brian McLean Comes to the Rescue of Stranded Senior and Disabled Riders**



While he officially works for the city of Vacaville, Brian McLean used his powers of persuasion to create a new, more flexible paratransit system for the entire county.

For his leadership role in establishing the Solano County Intercity Taxi Scrip Program for disabled residents — transforming their lives by providing 24/7 access to transportation — Brian McLean, fleet and transit manager for the city of Vacaville, is the recipient of MTC's 2010 Doris W. Kahn Accessible Transportation Award, named after a former MTC commissioner who championed equal access to services.

When Solano Paratransit was to be dissolved at the end of the 2009 fiscal year due to funding constraints, Solano County transportation officials convened a Senior and Disabled Transportation Summit to address the challenges of providing paratransit across city lines.

"Brian took ownership and rallied his colleagues to talk about the issues," said Daryl Halls, executive director of the Solano Transportation Authority. "He's a can-do person, a good collaborator, and prods his colleagues to get beyond parochial measures."

Following the summit, McLean realized that the legacy system of paratransit, which required scheduling rides a week in advance and was unavailable on weekends and evenings, had to be discarded. The

average cost of a single ride was \$81 (to the program, not the passenger). The deeply discounted taxi scrip program, a trifold of cooperation between transit agencies, taxis and riders, is far more flexible and less expensive than its predecessor, and is available 24/7 — as quick as a phone call away — with wait times averaging less than half an hour and average cost per ride at a much lower \$29–\$30. Riders are able to purchase \$100 worth of scrip for just \$15 through their local transit agency.

"Partnering with taxis was a natural fit," said McLean. "We had a large group of individuals who needed a ride and a large group of cabs that needed business. Once the idea was developed and put on paper, why would you continue with a bus-type paratransit service?"

Phase 1 of the program, for ambulatory ADA paratransit-certified residents, was implemented in February 2010, just seven months after the summit. In its first month, 48 passenger trips were made; in September, thanks to outreach and word-of-mouth, approximately 400 passenger trips were provided.
— Georgia Lambert



Award of Merit: Mike Rosenberg and the Bay Area News Group Track Transit's Troubles in Five-Part Series

Working the transportation beat for the *San Mateo County Times* in 2009, Mike Rosenberg reported on the financial strains facing SamTrans and Caltrain as they struggled to cope with the effects of a severe recession. Falling ridership and declining revenues were playing havoc with the budgets of the Peninsula's two principal transit agencies. Midway through the year, he realized that his colleagues at other Bay Area News Group newspapers were writing similar stories about BART, Muni, AC Transit and other transit operators.



Mike Rosenberg marshaled a team to crunch tons of data and conduct dozens of interviews for a five-part series on transit's woes.

"I noticed that we were all doing stories on different transit operators' financial problems, and they all seemed to lead to service cuts and fare hikes." His journalistic curiosity piqued, Rosenberg decided "to compile all of them together and look at this from a Bay Area-wide perspective."

This launched Rosenberg on what would ultimately become a five-month-long, in-depth journalistic investigation. The end

result — a five-part series titled "Running on Empty: Bay Area Transit in Trouble" — ran concurrently, from January 10 to 14, 2010, in Rosenberg's *San Mateo County Times* as well as in other Bay Area News Group papers, including the *San Jose Mercury News*, *Oakland Tribune* and *Contra Costa Times*. Drawing on dozens of interviews with Bay Area commuters, transit officials,

advocates and others — and synthesizing data from published reports and their own number-crunching — Rosenberg and his colleagues painted an unsettling portrait of a transit system that is vital to the environment and the economic life of the region, but which is nonetheless fighting for its life.

"Rising costs, vanishing state subsidies and declining tax reve-

lues" are the main financial problems afflicting the region's transit operators, Rosenberg wrote in the opening article of the series.

Rosenberg and seven colleagues personally tried out four commutes in different locations around the region; in each case one staffer drove and the other took transit to compare time and cost. The team found that while the transit trips were usually cheaper, the driving trips were usually quicker. They ascribed this latter finding, in part, to lighter-than-normal roadway traffic due to the recession — which only adds to transit's difficulty in attracting new riders.

The print editions of the "Running on Empty" series were supplemented with additional online material — including interactive maps and live online chats with representatives of BART, MTC and MTC's 511 traveler information service. The Bay Area News Group also partnered with ABC7 on broadcast stories.

"Mike was the lead reporter," said Glenn Rabinowitz, executive editor of the *San Mateo County Times*. "He brought together all the information and reached the key conclusions. But all together, I'd say at least 20 to 25 people were involved in this project."

At a time when the newspaper business is confronting some major financial challenges of its own, the decision by the Bay Area News Group to undertake an investigative effort of this magnitude was noteworthy.

"I really want to commend Mike and the Bay Area News Group for putting the resources into this," said Gabriel Metcalf, executive director of SPUR (San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association), and a close watcher of Bay Area transit. "It's tough in this day and age for a newspaper to do this kind of in-depth coverage. To allow a reporter the freedom to explore a topic in this much depth is just great." — Joe Curley



Award of Merit: Peninsula Ramp-Metering Project Speeds Commutes, Cuts Red Tape

Installing metering lights on freeway on-ramps is one thing. But turning them on can be something else altogether, with a lengthy local approval process. Thanks to a pioneering collaboration between Caltrans, the cities of San Mateo County and the City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County (C/CAG), the Bay Area now has a model for how to speed both the wheels of government and the wheels on commuters' cars.



Travel times during peak periods along southbound U.S. 101 from San Mateo to Palo Alto dropped nearly 30 percent in early

2007 — from about 35 minutes to just under 25 minutes — after metering lights were turned on at seven on-ramps along the roughly 12-mile stretch from State Route 92 to the Santa Clara County line. Yet the project's most important legacy may be found not amid the asphalt and concrete of the Bay Area freeway network, but in the region's city council chambers and county supervisors' board rooms.

"The partnership with C/CAG is more of a process innovation than it is a technology innovation," explained Alan Chow, office chief and supervising transpor-

tation engineer for Caltrans District 4.

The journey toward a faster commute started back in 2002 when C/CAG Executive Director Richard Napier approached Caltrans about developing a ramp-metering strategy for the whole county. "Our initial problem was getting San Mateo County's cities to even allow a study of activating the lights," recalled Napier.

To satisfy concerns about backups onto local streets, the partners agreed to install "spill-back" detectors on each on-ramp. When the detectors are tripped by a long line of waiting cars, the lights go all green until backups



San Mateo County's ramp-metering program is a model of interagency cooperation.

are eliminated. To address concerns about local control, a technical advisory committee — including city, C/CAG and Caltrans staff — was formed to manage operations of the metering lights. No party can unilaterally adjust the signal timing.

"The process we followed is transferable to the rest of the region," Napier said. "It's gratifying to see how well the metering lights have been accepted. We cut travel times by 10 minutes, and the price is typically just 20 to 25 seconds on the on-ramp. That's a small price to pay for such a big payoff." — John Goodwin

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